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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAMAKO 000320

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [ML](#)  
SUBJECT: BATTLE WITH BAHANGA BREWING NEAR KIDAL

REF: BAMAKO 00305

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy  
Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Tuareg bandit Ibrahim Bahanga has reportedly positioned his forces approximately 20 KM south-west of Kidal, blocking the road to Gao. A Malian military convoy that left Gao on March 31 to reinforce troops in Kidal was forced to pass the night in the village of Anafis, about 100 KM south-west of Kidal, after Bahanga reportedly threatened to attack any convoys destined for Kidal. One report stated that Bahanga has also threatened to mine the road between Gao and Kidal.

2.(C) The Governor of Kidal, Alhamdou ag Illyen, dispatched a delegation on March 31 to meet with Bahanga to defuse the situation. The delegation apparently returned to Kidal with nothing more than a promise from Bahanga not to attack the town of Kidal itself. Governor Illyen instructed government employees in Kidal not to report to work on April 1. This decision was intended to reduce tensions in Kidal but may have backfired by fueling rumors of an impending attack.

3.(C) Emissaries sent by the Tuareg team currently negotiating with Malian authorities in Libya also apparently tried to talk Bahanga down. Three Tuareg leaders - the president of the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change Iyad ag Ghali, Bahanga's father-in-law and Northern Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change (ATNMC) spokesman Hama ag Sid'Ahmed, and Mohamed ag Ahraib (another ATNMC leader who also belongs to the Ifergoumessen fraction of the Kidal Ifoghas) - traveled to Tripoli last week to meet with President Amadou Toumani Toure's personal military advisor and Libyan officials (Ref A). Bahanga's involvement in the Tripoli process has been ambiguous from the start and appeals by his "representatives" in Tripoli to stand down while the negotiations continue apparently proved unpersuasive.

4.(U) Late last week a delegation led by the Malian Red Cross visited the 37 Malian soldiers captured by Bahanga between March 20-22. The Red Cross returned with 4 soldiers who required medical attention, leaving 33 hostages with Bahanga. Meanwhile, residents of Aguelhoc, which was attacked by a new group of disaffected Tuaregs led by Eghless ag Oufene on March 26, have reportedly started leaving the town and setting up camps 10 to 15 KM away.

5.(C) Comment: This is the first time Bahanga and his group have descended south of Kidal. Bahanga's blocking position would cut off Malian forces within Kidal from reinforcements and supplies that would presumably come from Gao. Unless Bahanga is convinced to stand down, and soon, such a flagrant provocation of the Malian Army will likely result in a Malian

military response. Considering Mali's current record of 0-4 against Bahanga, the prospects of a successful outcome this time around are not encouraging.

16. (U) EAC meeting has met and a warden message will be cleared separately to advise on the security implications of these developments in the far north of Mali.

LEONARD